

LUTHERAN  
WOMAN  
**TODAY**

SEPTEMBER  
1995

PROCESSED

AUG 1 / 1995

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# A Good Name

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Claudia Katie  
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Gayle Lavonne Tamrah  
Monica Nannette  
Amelia Fron  
Kay

## Letters to the editor ♦♦

### Valuing Family

The body of Christ and the community of saints are truly represented in the May LWT.

It has been such a blessing to me. My dear husband died suddenly and unexpectedly April 5 this year. I didn't have a chance to read the issue when it first came out. But in recent days it has taken on a great support role for me. I am taking the time to gradually and fully digest this food for my soul.

*Mary L. Curtis  
Findlay, Ohio*

### 40 Devotions, Yes

I really appreciated the "40 Devotions for Lent" in the April LWT. I read them daily and liked the commentary with each devotion. I did this before eating my breakfast every morning. It would be nice if you repeated this type of thing again in 1996. The Sunday devotions in LWT for April were appreciated, too.

*Dorothy Anderson  
Manitowoc, Wis.*

### Beans, Yes

Thank you for your support of Women's Bean Project. The article you published [December '94 LWT] profiling us generated a huge response from your readers which helped make this past Christmas season our best ever.

Your readers are a consistent source of support across the United States, both in sales and in educating others about our work. By helping spread the word about Women's Bean Project you have contributed to a creative, problem-solving solution to the devastating long-term problem of women who are homeless and women living in poverty.

*Jossy Eyre  
Women's Bean Project  
Denver, Colo.*

### Nestingen, Yes

The Bible study this year is wonderful! Dr. Nestingen's down-to-earth homeyness and humor make the study pure delight. Please ask to do the Bible study any time.

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ng. I do find the background  
on the tape makes him diffi-  
to understand.

*Shirley Kocher  
Hooper, Neb.*

### **er Yesses**

oyed reading a few articles and  
g pictures that the LWR quilts  
etting to the right places and  
g used. It inspired me to go to  
sewing machine and start  
her one.

*Kathleen Sharp  
Hartford City, Ind.*

I'd like Constance Lovaas Beck  
now how much my husband  
appreciated "Easter Monday."  
[LWT].

*Pearl Goldenstein  
Lincoln, Neb.*

### **e Noes**

t a waste of four pages in the  
h LWT with "What is a  
e?" Come on—let's stay with  
caring Christian stories and  
that type of article for "Ms"  
azine.

*Mrs. William (Bonnie)  
Anderson  
Hoyt Lake, Minn.*

s sending an enclosed copy of  
s and explanation of what the  
says on homosexuality. This  
is in regards to Deb Price's  
le "LWT Letter to Editor  
rates Support" [March LWT].  
s quoted as saying Mrs. Huffey  
"Jesus says nothing about  
sexuality." This is not true, for  
ible is the Word of God (Jesus).  
also sending Mrs. Huffey these  
s. I think it would be good to  
*Put a Geranium in Your Hat  
Be Happy.* This couple didn't



## **'Bye and God Bless!**

In the six years that Cynthia  
Mickelson has been with LWT,  
she's moved from editorial secre-  
tary to editorial specialist to  
assistant editor. Now she's mov-  
ing on to a full-time master's  
degree program in Library and  
Information Science. We miss  
her already, especially her cre-  
ativity and leadership. Go in  
peace, Cindy, serve the Lord. We  
thank God for you!

accept their gay son, and because  
they didn't he later turned his life  
around and became a Christian.

*Mrs. Donald Roe  
Hazel, S.D.*

*Thank you for the many let-  
ters about LWT's new paper.  
We are in conversation with  
our printer about how to cut  
down on the glare. Watch for  
future adjustments. —ED.*

# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

September 1999  
Volume 8  
No. 8

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**TC\***

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Check out the news and information about the \*Triennial Convention in the Twin Cities.

For the benefit of Women of the ELCA participants, articles relating to Women of the ELCA mission areas are marked, at their conclusion, with these symbols:

**A**=action, **C**=community and **G**=growth.

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39; courtesy ELCA Archives, 43; Gregory Staley, 44.

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Plop. Splat. Splash.

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# Consider the Source...

Kathleen Kastilahn

**I** hadn't heard Will cry in years. But behind the slammed door of my 17-year-old son's room came the unmistakable sound of sobbing. I stood outside—until I couldn't stand it any longer. I walked in and sat down on the bed.

He'd been benched. Because he wasn't "serious." The punishment was handed out by the varsity baseball coach. The verdict was based on false witness, from the coach's own eyes. He watched a kid have fun on the field, but didn't see his passion. My eyes did. Images of innings from past springs flashed by as I sat and wondered what I could say to my son whose teammates called him "Base" because he stole so many. Will *played* baseball.

But not anymore, he vowed, his temper rising even as his breathing calmed: He would quit.

I'd been warned by other parents who'd watched this coach from the bleachers that he wasn't fair. That he was stubborn. That he'd ride certain kids hard. Many had complained to the athletic director about how he handled the team. Maybe I would, too. But that wasn't what I was wor-

ried about right then. I knew I couldn't change what had happened. I couldn't bring in a stack of Will's past coaches to testify on his behalf. I certainly couldn't lessen this hurt and make it better. I could only help Will change how he dealt with it.

"Quitting," I started, "lets the coach believe his own false criticism. 'You're not serious.' It almost makes it become the truth." But my son was losing him.

Then I remembered my advice: Consider the source. Consider the source, treat it with the silent contemplation it deserves. That got his attention. Will's "Bampa" always has been a giant to him. He's the one who "gave" Will his red hair and taught him to fish. So Will looked at me and listened.

And I told him how often I had repeated that phrase when my sister and I were growing up. I often thought that when the inevitable, sometimes intentional, injuries came our way on the wings of words, we'd be able to say to ourselves, just "consider the source" and regain our perspective, in our rightful place.

you don't have to let this coach—one else who doesn't know or the truth about you—define you are," I told Will. "Consider he is and then treat what he about you in a way that lets you not his view of you."

told him this baseball wouldn't be the last person who would hold, or all, false views about him. part of life.

much a part of life, that cognized it as one of the six sins we humans regularly fall into, and laid down the law about it: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Still we break the law. And we hurt when broken over our backs. It is us.

God knows that, too, of course. In law he decreed that a woman bear—not give birth to, or carry—lies against another. That is the commandment. So he acted so that we not only not suffer, not be burdened by—lies against ourselves. That is the cross.

**N**o one can truly ever take away our good name. That name we are given as we are baptized: "William, child of God, you have been sealed by the Spirit and marked with the name of Christ forever."

I never thought to ask Dad, recently, where his blunt speech came from. And he had to go back seven decades to the small grocery where he worked as a kid. The old Irishman he stood

next to—filling orders for dried fruits, nuts, and other bulk fancy goods—tose off the phrase, Dad recalled, as he dealt with work-a-day annoyances.

So that's the source of "Con-

# Consider the SOURCE and treat it with the silent contempt it deserves.

sider the source...." Well, that's how Dad heard it first. It seems so ordinary now.

But the proverb gains its power from another source: God. God is the source of our being. When we consider that source, we stand in truth. We can withstand false witness. We can even play ball—from the bench. **G**

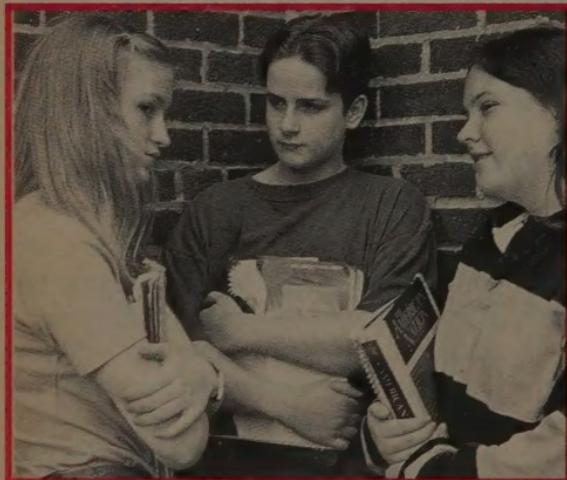
*Kathleen Kastilahn, Evanston, Ill., is features editor for The Lutheran. She is a member of Wilmette Lutheran Church, Wilmette, Ill.*

# Stand Against the Tide

Laura Nelson

**When I was in eighth grade, I often got a ride home after school from my best friend's mom.** She would listen to us talk about the day's events. But when we started to go on and on about a teacher we couldn't stand, or a classmate who was driving us crazy, she would say to us, "Remember that the thing about going home is that it always comes back to you."

One of the most painful experiences in life is hearing ~~fa~~ cruel things said about ourselves. It doesn't even matter whether



By observing the verbal punishment given out for those who violate our group's standards, whether it's wearing the wrong lip or the wrong jeans, you can anticipate the same punishment for yourself. One of my friends says she still feels the scars of having forced by her mother to wear jeans from Sears to middle school. Designer jeans were the only acceptable kind to wear. Gossiping as a deterrent. We learn quickly from gossip that, if we want to remain in good standing with the group, it would be good to avoid making these same mistakes.

Middle school is probably the first time we are faced with the task of finding our own way into a group. Our parents and teachers can encourage us, but it is at this point in our lives that ultimately we are on our own in finding a group to be a part of in school. This isn't always easy.

person speaking is someone trusted or someone we don't particularly respect. It is painful the same. Equally painful, in a different way, is discovering your flippant and unkind remarks have traveled back to hurt someone you care about.

Yet gossip is so much a part of the fabric of human conversation. Some say this is because it plays an important role in defining the group. Through gossip, members of the group come to know and define the group's standards.

In middle school we have our first face-scrunching taste of Revolving best friends. Awkward romances. Breaking up. Coming back together. Hesitant talents. Being chosen. Being cut. Even in these experiences, we move in groups like giant caterpillars, each with distinct traits and markings. To be cut apart from the group is all but unthinkable.

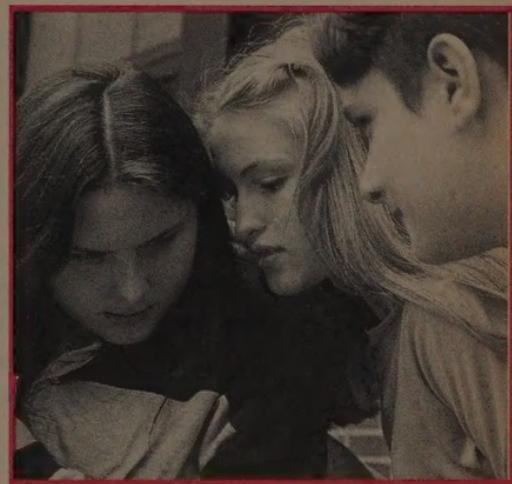
Moving in groups is natural because God created us to live in groups. It is part of the design of the human community. We are born into groups. We move from playgroups to classrooms and little league teams to groups of friends that evolve throughout our lives as our interests and situations change. In groups we support one another in our weaknesses and encourage one another to push forward with our strengths. And yet, in middle school, we discover that the caterpillar effect of group means that at times we are pulled in a direction that is the

opposite of where our conscience and our faith would lead us.

One of the fastest shortcuts in uniting a group is to uncover a common enemy. Perhaps that is why middle school classrooms can function like mini-courtrooms. A person's name or behavior comes up in conversation and her case is heard, convicted, and sentenced by a jury of their peers—all within matter of a few minutes. The instant judgments that determine a person to be in or out leave lingering, wounding labels.

In high school, we have learned the hard fact that the world all too rarely looks beneath the surface, or beyond the outward appearances of a person. Yet God looks at not only outward appearance, but looks into our hearts. The Eighth Commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor," says that we are to live by God's standards, not the standards of a group. To go along with the crowd in making judgments about people is to step into the role of judge—a role that is meant for us.

Martin Luther says in the Large Catechism that it is the nature of humanity that "evil though we are, we cannot tolerate evil spoken of us; we want the golden compliments of the world. Yet we cannot bear to hear the best spoken of others." Luther says that although we live in a world that delights in condemning judgments, as people of faith we need to stand against the tide, even if it means enduring the disfavor of friends and neighbors.



As we get older, we discover that dealing with gossip going against the crowd don't get any easier. But we also discover that our character can be seen in how we deal with the wrongs of the people around us. The way that people hear us speaking about those with whom we are having problems gives them a clear picture of how we will speak of them in times of conflict.

**W**e live in the midst of our many groups, and we come to know well the people with whom we live, study, work, and serve. It is all but unavoidable not to rub up against the weak points of the people around us. It reflects well on our character when we refuse to exploit their weaknesses and make wrongs public knowledge in order to make ourselves look a little better.

Being a part of any group puts us in the role of being witness to the people around us. Our words have power to wound, but they also have tremendous power to heal. At times, we may speak hard words—to right wrongs, and to warn others of their dangerous behavior. But when we speak those hard words, we are commanded—directly, in love and in private—our words are an invitation to forgiveness, and our words can build trust.

The Eighth Commandment demands a lot from us. Without God, the expectation to defend and speak well of our neighbors and to explain their actions in the kindest way asks too much of us because what is in our hearts is ultimately what is going to come out of our mouths.

But the good news is that God is not looking into our hearts; God is healing our hearts. God can even take our words that are intended for harm and create good from them (see Genesis 50:20). When we speak from healing hearts, our words can have an immense impact on a group. Standing up for someone is not immediately gratifying for a group, but it is the only path to reconciliation. C

*Laura Nelson, Madison, Wis., is a pastor at Bethel Lutheran Church. She grew up in a family of four sisters who helped each other survive junior high.*



# Bad News or Blessing?

John M. Blomquist

A short while after I graduated from California Lutheran College in May of 1973, I began working there as an admissions counselor. After spending more than three-quarters of my time as a student, I found it hard to think of myself as an "administrator." Others, I soon learned, would see that identity shift much more quickly than I.

Along with two returning students, I was assigned to a small group for new-student orientation. During one meeting, I happily recounted how good my experience had been at Cal Lutheran and how the "kids" were really great. A returning student glared at me and responded bluntly, "We are *not*."

I was both embarrassed and hurt by the reprimand. Clearly I was no longer one of the "kids," even though I still felt myself to be. In a short time, I had become one of them, an administrator—not a particularly enviable position after the turmoil of the '60s. But I hadn't

really changed, had I?

The student who corrected me—in retrospect, I admit, rightfully—knew I was a recent graduate. But that didn't matter. What mattered was that I was now an Administrator (with a capital A). All of his perceptions and misperceptions of administrators were loaded onto me simply because of my role. Whatever I did or said was suspect because of my job.

This story comes to mind now because it seems that often we assume the worst of those in any kind of position of authority. Teachers, pastors, church administrators, politicians, and others are fair game for everything from subtle put-downs to blatant lies. We easily pass on what we learn from "those in the know," whether or not they in fact *know* anything.

Why do we do this? Why do we have such a strong tendency to put down, belittle, and talk about others? It shows up everywhere—in newspapers and on talk shows, in humor and advertising, on the floors of Congress and of grocery stores, at home, at school, at play—even at

church. Without thinking, we label one acquaintance “crazy,” a supervisor “workaholic,” a child’s peer “slow,” church officials “liberal,” “conservative,” “un-Christian,” whatever else has negative connotations for us or with whom we are talking.

We buttress our labels and opinions with rationalizations, misinformation, gossip, and, at times, lies. Whether driven by jealousy, low self-esteem, or the desire to command attention or be one of the crowd, the result is the same: We bear false witness and diminish the presence of the Holy in the world.

In his commentary on the Eighth Commandment, found in the Large Catechism, Martin Luther writes, “It is a

## We buttress our labels and opinions with **rationalizations, misinformation, gossip, and, at times, lies.**

whole world. Yet we cannot bear to hear the best spoken about others.”

“Bad news sells,” the adage goes. In a somewhat different way, that is what Luther says as well. But as people of faith, we are not called to share the bad news but the good news. What might this mean for us as we talk of our neighbors—both those we know and those we do not? What good news might we share as we talk about people in authority, colleagues, family or friends, immigrants, political “advisaries,” or the poor?

**W**e sometimes have the tendency to think of the Ten Commandments as all about bad news—all those “thou shalt not” do or what *not* to do. Perhaps one of the reasons we treat the commandments indifferently, or assume that they only apply to other people—“bad” people—and not to us.

But perhaps part of the reason we struggle with the commandments is that we don’t see that at heart they are an invitation to life—a life lived in harmony with the Word. The Eighth Commandment, for example, is quite clear about what it commands us *not* to do. But perhaps what is

is what it invites us *to do*—and this is where the good comes in.

Certainly the commandment doesn't invite us to lie by good things that aren't true or to be Pollyannas who think there is brokenness and evil in this world that need healing and righting. But what it does invite us to do, Jesus so often did, is to evoke the wholeness and holiness that are God's will for all people.

Have you ever known someone who gave you confidence and courage, who could see capabilities and capacities in you that you couldn't see, someone who always made you feel better about yourself? We say these people bring out the best in others. This, I think, is the invitation of the Eighth Commandment—to bring out the best in others and in ourselves. Instead of being bearers of bad news, we are to be bearers of good news, bestowers of blessing.

Some years ago I read a definition of *blessing* that continues to challenge and nourish me: "In blessing we express our attitude to God for the divine form inherent in other persons. We ask God in effect to bring this form to fullness"

—John Muto, *Celebrating the Single Life: A Spirituality for Single Persons in Today's World*, Doubleday & Company,

). The flip side, then, "you shall not bear false witness..." is this: You bless others with words, giving thanks to the Divine Presence in them and praying that the Holy may be brought to fullness in and through them.

Words are potent and powerful. If nothing else in my encounter with the student long ago, I did learn that. And this is what the Eighth Commandment tells us as well. It reminds us to use the power of our words not for harm but for wholeness, not to bear bad news but to bestow blessing. As children of God, we are invited to wholeness and, through every word and action, we are to extend that invitation to others as well. C

M. Blomquist works in the area of spiritual direction as a writer, speaker, workshop / retreat facilitator; and spiritual director. She is the author of *Walking Till Dawn: Awakening to Life in Times of Single* (Upper Room Books, 1994) and lives with her husband in Berkeley, Calif.

## As people of faith, we are not called to share the bad news but the GOOD news.



# Word Power

Gwen Carr

"If you can't say something good about someone, don't say anything at all."

We all have grown up hearing this advice and perhaps even followed it ourselves. It challenges us to use words to lift up and not to tear down. To fully comprehend this statement, it is important to acknowledge the power of the spoken word in our society.

We are powerfully influenced and shaped by what we are told about ourselves from childhood. These messages often form the basis of our concepts about who we are, what we are capable of accomplishing, and how we see the world around us. They are essentially the foundation of our self-esteem. An example might be the many little girls who are told they are not good at math...and the many women who avoid technical fields as a result of this message! We also know that

adults spend millions of dollars on therapy to identify such negative messages and to replace them with positive ones.

Current trends in politics

**Words can be  
powerful  
weapons that  
destroy lives  
and divide  
nations.**

us another perspective on the impact of words. We live in a world where being conservative or liberal or a mix of both immediately evokes mental sets of assumptions and expected behaviors. These labels discourage us from critical thinking and meaningful

dialog and are replaced by convenient prepackaged judgments that form barriers to community.

Words—while in themselves neutral—when used inappropriately can be powerful weapons that destroy lives and divide nations. Words can give life, engendering love, trust, faith, hope—and can also destroy life, diminishing, devaluing, and discrediting.

Perhaps this is why God chose to address the use of words as part of the Ten Commandments. If it is true that the first four commandments address issues of honoring God, then the next six address how we honor God's creation. Taken in that context, Eighth Commandment deals directly with the ways we dishonor God by showing a lack of respect for our neighbors—lying about them, bearing false witness.

This, perhaps, is not a traditional way of thinking about the Eighth Commandment, but it has helped to bring the law into focus and my relationship with God. In fact, this commandment takes on greater significance when seen from another perspective: It is not "good enough" simply to follow the law of lying about my neighbor; we are told to honor God's higher calling of using words to affirm and to build up.

How differently we might treat each other if we truly believed our neighbor's honor, reputation, character, and self-esteem were all gifts from God. Would we be as quick to gossip, speculate, spread rumor and mendacity? Could we stand silent if we knew God's creation was being disrespected?

Let's go one step farther. This commandment also implies that we should be straightforward and honest with each other. We would be wise to expect that all our relationships will be without conflict. After

all, do we not all sin and fall short of the glory of God? The important thing is that by honoring each other and looking for opportunities to build up each other, we are less apt to fall into negative behaviors, even when we are disappointed with one another. Many of us have learned to give each other the silent treatment, using the excuse that "if we can't say something good, we won't say anything at all." Such behavior can be equally as damaging.

God calls us to love and honor each other as a part of creation. This call is neither passive nor easy, for our society pushes us in the opposite direction by preying on the very worst in us. The past few years have spawned a host of talk shows, movies, and books designed to give credence to chaos in the form of gossip, innuendo, malice, and slander. It is hard to tell fact from fiction when the line is so often blurred with half-truths to sell ads and air time.

We can no longer trust what we say to each other. In fact, we have become so accustomed to being "lied to" that we are beginning to believe that the truth does not exist. Think of how demonic that sounds.

And yet, in the midst of all of this, God calls us to represent truth in these times. Certainly, if not us, then who? It begins with being truthful about who we are, and how we relate to God, and then to each other, on a daily basis. It means trying to see the world as God sees it, and being a light in the midst of

## Words can give life by engendering love, trust, faith, and hope.

darkness. It means seeking to find the best in ourselves and others, and not collapsing under the weight of uncertainty, disappointment, or conflict. It means honoring God and each other in all aspects of our lives: as we make decisions about how we spend our time and our money; which issues we support; what we stand for and against; when to speak up and when to be silent.

If only it were as simple as keeping the specific law as outlined in the Ten Commandments. If only it were a matter of not lying. But along with the law, we also believe in grace. And it is in the context of

God's grace for us that we now are liberated to look upon each other with the same measure of grace, to value the precious gifts of God to be valued and honored. **C**

*Gwen Carr is a member of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Salem, Ore. She served as the church-wide president of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America from 1990 to 1993.*



# Jesus and the Workplace

**H**ow does Jesus fit into the workplace? It can seem so difficult to reflect our religious beliefs in our words and actions while at work.

Personally, I want to share God's good news and be a living example of what God's good grace has done for me, for each of us. And so I've thought about ways we can, in the workplace, be an example for Christian life.

We can enjoy ourselves and our co-workers. Try commenting on the positives in each person rather than the negatives. Avoid the gossip circle for something more constructive. Vow to be a person in your workplace who can be depended upon. Be a morale booster. Look for ways to improve situations rather than grumble or complain about them.

Let us listen for opportunities to share our faith story. In many small ways we can, by example, share the good news of Jesus Christ. We can, by our witness, sow seeds for the Holy Spirit to nurture. **G**

*Susan Shoup  
Port Orchard, Wash.*

# VERITA and the BEST CONSTRUCTION CREW

Chris and Bob Sitze

Several months had elapsed since Verita and her friends had completed their study of the Ten Commandments. Their eyes had been opened, their spirits were soaring with possibilities, and now they wanted to do something about what they had learned. Verita and her Bible study group joined a few more friends in a new, unofficial organization, "The Best Construction Crew."

## Verita Flores

After we studied the Eighth Commandment closely, we felt pretty bad about ourselves. First, we thought about all the ways we sin in our talking and thinking about other people. Second, we felt helpless in always trying to avoid these sins, as though avoidance of evil made it somehow holier. But when we read the last part of the commandment's meaning, we realized that there were things we could do to obey the commandment. And that's when we decided to start a new group in our congregation. And name it after an old way of understanding the end of Jesus' explanation of the Eighth Commandment, "putting the best construction on everything."

## Jerry Awle

When Verita first asked me to join this group, I didn't understand why "The Best Construction Crew" would be important. But now I understand: There's so much hateful-spiteful speech going on these days. So many people ready to be angry with their words. So many folks looking for evil in every word of other people. So many good ones being destroyed carelessly. Our crew is going to help people around us do more than avoid disobeying this commandment; we're going to help them see the blessed side of this command from God. How to build up God's world with our words!





### Jacques Hammer

When Verita asked me to tell her my honest opinion about being part of this group, I was flattered. A lot of people at church think I'm just an old grouch. Maybe it's the way I look, or maybe all they see is the hard-boiled part of me. I wish they knew how hard I try to "tell the truth in love." In some situations it may be hard to pass off my truth-telling as loving, but that's the way I feel when I get down deep.



### Peg Board

I'm excited to be part of "The Best Construction Crew." I'm going to be working on building up the image of the younger generation among older people like myself. I know that it's hard to understand the young people sometimes. I've been to our church sometimes, and I've been the first to complain in the past. But even though I'm still not sure about young people nowadays, I'm going to spend some time talking with some of them, listening to what they think is important. That doesn't mean that I'll agree with everything they're doing, but at least I'll be trying to explain their actions in the kindest way when others talk about them.



### Rusty Nayle

When Verita asked me to join her crew, I wasn't surprised. It's hard for me to like people different from me. I know it isn't right, but it's pretty hard for me to accept viewpoints that I think the Bible says are wrong. My world is kind of a dangerous place—crime, hurting people, families falling apart—and I don't really know if I can bear that accepting. But Verita..., well she's pretty persuasive. "Try it for awhile," she said, "and see if you can learn a new way of thinking." So now I'm part of "The Best Construction Crew," even though it's hard for me to do.



### Molly Bolte

I'm going to be part of Verita's crew all right, but it won't be without some difficulty. I really don't want to be one of those people who never says anything unless it's necessary. My goodness, things around this church aren't always nice, and the way we treat each other isn't good. If I'm going to be on the crew, there's going to be some demolition going on, too! Some things will have to be torn down before we can do any construction.

## **Le Zherz**

of the things I'm going to try to construct is a method anyone can use to turn around a gossipy conversation. Some phrases, some light comments, some body language, some good questions that will stop a group from focusing on an unknown person, or someone who isn't present. Maybe I'll start with, "How well do you know this person?" or, "My experience with her has actually been really good," or, "Isn't it possible that his motives were really the opposite of what you're saying?" It might be fun to see if I can pick apart the petty patter of some of the groups I'm with.



## **D Dherr**

not sure if I want to be in Verita's group. All during Bible study I kept thinking, "These people in this group don't know how many times I've smiled at them at church and then turned around later in the week and listened to gossip about them without defending them." I still feel guilty about being a gossip consumer.

Then again, because I feel so guilty about not defending my friends, maybe "The Best Construction Crew" will be a place where I can apologize and ask for forgiveness. And I'll be the one they'll be building back up?



## **Le Gehrder**

This crew is going to accomplish something, we're going to start with some good old-fashioned analysis and discerning. Where have things fallen apart or relationships been disintegrated? Where do we have a chance to change things? I expect that our group is going to face some difficulties. But I trust that we'll also face the Holy Spirit blowing the wind of God in our faces, and helping us understand that God's Word for us is always forgiving, always encouraging, always upbuilding.



## **ogue**

said that "The Best Construction Crew" gradually began to encompass the entire congregation. Whatever the gifts of the people, God used them as small tools, bits of building material, skills and other gifts from which this congregation constructed a place where the gospel is proclaimed in truth and deed to this very day. **CGA**

*and Bob Sitze have co-authored books, articles, curriculum, and devotional materials for more than 20 years. They live in Elgin, Ill., and are grateful that God has not yet finished building them.*

# To Tell the Truth

Adele Stiles Resmer

## The Value of Truth-Telling

A full and enriching life together requires the living out of a number of important values and principles, including truth-telling. There are several benefits to telling the truth. When there is a good match between who we are and how we represent ourselves to others, we feel better about ourselves. When we are truthful about what we believe and do, our sense of self-worth is strengthened.

At the same time, when we are truthful about who we are and what we believe and do, trust is built among us. While we may not like or even appreciate some of the people with whom we live and/or work, we can trust those who are truthful about who they are and what they believe and do. Trust is an important foundation for life together, whether in a family, workplace, or the larger society.

Life together is further enhanced because truth-telling allows us to be accountable to each

other. Telling the truth about ourselves means revealing our strengths, and successes; our shortcomings, weaknesses, and failings. Some of what we do serves us and others well; other things are helpful or harmful. Our willingness to accept both praise and blame, when fairly given, strengthens us and the communities in which we live and work.

Truth-telling, however, can be risky business. When we speak the truth, we make ourselves vulnerable. We expose ourselves. Sometimes that vulnerability is respected; other times it is abused.

## The Conditions for Truth-Telling

For Christians, the truth is spoken in love (Ephesians 4:15). The conditions are not to use the truth as a weapon to harm each other, but as an instrument to benefit each other. Telling the truth in love does not mean telling the truth, only one's version of the truth, or not saying the

g at all. How do we know which voice serves the truth? It's the voice that is spoken with the intent to love and build up, rather than to harm or break down.

Second, Christians speak only a partial truth. Why is this? Because we recognize that the only absolute truth is God. Our truth is partial and distorted by sin (1 Corinthians 15:2). This is not a reason to abandon a pursuit of the truth. Knowing that our truths are partial and distorted simply produces an appropriate amount of humility into our thinking. It keeps our reliance on God, who is the only one who knows for certain if the truth has been served.

Without love and humility, we build people up with our truth and not only ourselves. With love and humility, we build up possibilities between us and serve the truth.

### Limits of Truth-Telling

Truth-telling does not exist in isolation. It exists, often in tension, with most of other values such as respect for persons, nurturing human life, justice, beneficence, confidentiality, and preventing harm. When one or more of these other values take precedence, we may be relieved from the obligation to tell the truth.

For example, we would not tell a man where to find his wife, if we know she is hiding to escape his battering. Truth-telling is resisted in order to prevent harm. We would not insist on telling a patient their life-threatening diag-

nosis if they come from a culture that expects not to be told such information. Truth-telling is set aside in order to respect persons.

Good, sometimes life-saving, reasons may exist for not telling the truth. However, because truth-telling is such an important value among us, those who want to set it aside must always be prepared to

**Truth-telling can be risky business. When we speak the truth, we make ourselves vulnerable.**

argue why that is necessary in this particular situation. Otherwise, the weight remains with telling the truth. Despite the challenges involved in serving the truth, it is worth the effort and the risk. It strengthens us, builds trust between us and keeps us appropriately accountable to each other. C

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# To *Create* or to **Destroy**

Grace Adolphsen Brame

# We

human beings have the awesome power to create or to destroy, to give life or to kill. We can choose to maim or try to heal, to uplift or put down, to encourage or discourage, to build up or to break. We can be part of a problem or part of its solution. We have a choice between power used for others and power used for ourselves.

them. And this is as true in the church as it is in families, schools, or societies.

Power is not evil. It is necessary for life. It was created good. How to use power is our challenge.

The tongue is most frequently our instrument of power. It is controlled by the impulses of the heart, it speaks (Matthew 12:34). “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” What comes from the heart, said Jesus, blesses or defiles us well as our neighbors (Mark 7:20-23, Matthew 15:11). James writes: “...the tongue is a small member” that can be “set on fire by hell.” “With it we bless the Lord..., and with it we curse [ourselves] who are made in the likeness of God” (James 3:5-9).

In regard to the Eighth Commandment, Luther writes in the Large Catechism: “There is nothing...that can do greater good or greater harm, in spiritual or in temporal matters, than this smallest and weakest of [our] members, the tongue.”

Perhaps Jesus’ strongest words about the tongue come from the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard it said... ‘...you shall not murder....’ But I say to you...if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You have lied,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew 5:21-22). Jesus, to destroy by words was murder.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words never hurt me!” We were taught to say it as children. But it is true! Centuries before Jesus, the ancients realized that words were like arrows. Once sent, they lodge in the heart and cannot be removed.

It is easier to destroy than to create, and it is far quicker.

sider the example of a reporter building his or her reputation by destroying that of another—permanently. Consider mean-spirited denigration—often cast as “humor.” Consider the erosion of public officials, leaving few role models left to emulate.

To many of us, gossip is only a game, a curiosity. We have a sensitivity about what we are helping to destroy. But the bad word and the lie are cannibalistic. They feed on the life of another.

Yet attempting to say nothing unkind about anyone can allow institutions to fall apart, inadequate leadership to continue, and falsehood, by omission of truth, to be taught. Let us speak the truth. Evil must be exposed. We are not asked to be inappropriately nice. Instead, we are commanded not to bear false witness. Without truth and trust, society will disintegrate. So will our homes and schools. So will our churches.

What can we do?

We must gain the ability to disagree without destroying, to assess without belittling. We need to recognize our power and choices.

Luther writes in his Large Catechism: “Besides our own body, our wife or husband, and our temporal property, we have more treasure which is indispensable to us, namely, our honor and good name,...for it is intolerable to live in public disgrace and contempt.”

How very true! We are powerless without a good name.

We need each other. We are guardians of each other’s honor. In the body of Christ, the church, we are called to support each other. We are asked “to provoke one another to love and good works,” to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:24, 25).

All this is a matter of giving life. And isn’t this the meaning of life—to give life? It always has been for God! God is our creator. Jesus came to give life and to give it abundantly (John 10:10). The Holy Spirit, “the Lord and giver of life,” eternally inspires and heals, liberates and guides,

and reveals truth and reminds us of what matters.

And God has called us to the same magnificent privilege: to give life. We cannot do it for ourselves. But there is no one who can do it for another.

Alleluia! CGA

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# The Hidden Promise

James A. Nestingen



## Session 9 A Word in Due Season Study Text: Exodus 20:16 Story Text: Psalm 41

### **The Eighth Commandment You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way.

#### **Memory Text**

“...Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34).

#### **Overview**

After life, faithful friends, and some property, the most important gifts we have are a good name and truthful speech. A good name opens doors; truthful speech gives us a reliable sense of what is going on around us. God commands us to be careful with our language, to respect one another's names, and to speak the truth in love.

#### **Opening**

O Lord our God, as you have taken hold of our hearts in the abundance of your grace, help us to open our mouths accordingly that our words will faithfully serve you and our neighbors. Amen.

#### **The Story**

Sometimes the best way to see what is at stake in a commandment is to talk to a victim—somebody who has suffered the results of

g broken. Psalm 41 gives us such an opportunity. It is written by a person who has gotten sick, among other things, on other people's talk.

The psalm begins with the promise of the gospel. Just as Mary's words in the Magnificat celebrate God's special concern for poor and cast-off (Luke 1:46-55), so in Psalm 41:1-3, the psalmist recites all that God has done.

**Read verses 1-3** and make a list of the action words.

What does God do for those who are suffering?

Why would God seem to have such a special interest in those experiencing loss?

Having invoked the promises of God, in verse 4 the psalmist proceeds to the complaint. A poor, sick man, he was having his own day of trouble. And so he did what the Second Commandment requires: he called upon God for help. As he did, the psalmist laid bare his heart.

The first thing the psalmist did was to confess his sins. There may be conflict situations where one party is fairly innocent, usually when there is conflict, everybody involved has something to confess. The psalmist knew God's graciousness and so he knew there was no use in pretending he wasn't implicated in his difficulties, at least partially.

The psalmist didn't name his sin, but he knew whom he sinned against—God. How are our sins against our neighbors also sins against God?

What makes a confession of sin so important at this point?

After confessing his sin against God, the psalmist begins to describe the difficulty he is having with his neighbors. Some of them he describes very harshly; they are his “enemies” (verse 6), among them a person who was once the psalmist’s best friend (verse 9).

Generally, it seems that decent people aren’t supposed to have enemies. But the trouble the psalmist describes with friends isn’t so unusual. They come to visit him on his sickbed, speak to him in empty phrases, and then break his confidences (verses 7-8). They whisper among themselves about him (verse 7), and talk casually about his death (verse 8).

That’s the way it usually works. The people who cause us most hurt are generally very close to home—in the family, at work, in the community—and their words are their weapons.

This is the significance of the memory text. If we are ourselves heard breaking a confidence or saying something derogatory about another, we’re likely to protest: “I didn’t mean it. I didn’t realize what I said was confidential. I was only kidding.” But Jesus knows that there is a direct connection between our hearts and our mouths. In other words, even those spoken jokingly, have a way of revealing our attitudes, fears, and resentments. So Jesus underscores the Eighth Commandment, telling us to keep a lid on our mouths.

But Jesus goes even further, as he always does, reaching deep inside of us. Jesus reassures us with the word of givenness and asks us to do the same—even, and especially, at home and among those closest to us. Knowing how difficult this is for us, he teaches us to ask for help in forgiving, in the Fifth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” While broken confidences, words of frustration, fear, and hate make enemies, words of grace open up a new day. Jesus is at work helping us even before we ask.

### **3.** How might the psalmist’s neighbors have reacted to his description of them (verses 6-9)?

Is his bitterness unusual for this kind of situation?

erse 5, the psalmist indicates what is really at stake in the  
llict. He is concerned about his life, though he appears fair-  
confident that he will recover (verses 10-13). What bothers  
is what is happening to his name.

One source of his concern is the possibility of dying and  
g forgotten. Before Christ brought the hope of the resur-  
ion, a memory was all a person left behind—when a person  
forgotten, her name died.

But there is something more to this concern. You can  
it if you substitute identity, reputation or credit rating for  
word name.

### What's in a name—a reputation?

ne some of the ways your name is a pass-  
d for your reputation.

y could the “death” of a person’s name inflict  
ing death upon the victim?

### The Command

re is more to the psalm, but this is enough discussion to see  
of the major purposes of the Eighth Commandment. Our  
s get caught up in our names. A good name is literally life-  
ng. A person can move about freely, anticipating people’s  
come, respect, and trust. A bad name becomes a living  
th. It follows a person around, destroying the confidence  
respect of others. By blocking trust, a bad name blocks a  
son’s way into the future.

Luther’s explanation of the commandment lists three  
s in which this commandment is commonly violated.  
*Revelation* is what happened to the psalmist after people visited  
. His visitors broke confidence in a way that put him at a  
dvantage. *Slender* is a false report or misrepresentation  
damages another person’s reputation. *Lies* are falsehoods.

**5.** How do these three sins make a person's name perish?

Name some common examples of each of the

The Eighth Commandment has another purpose as well, that goes deeper than simply restricting us from betraying, slandering, or lying. Though we often express frustration about language, we must use words to do so. Words are the medium of life. It is through our language that God speaks to us, and it is with words that we make and maintain relationships with the people and the world in which we live.

Luther used to say that liars have to have good memories. One distortion usually requires another and another still another, until finally one lie has spun a web of deceit. Then things become so distorted that no one can be sure of what is right, wrong, up, down, or inside out. The Eighth Commandment calls us to speak the truth between us.

**6.** How might advertising, for instance distort the truth in public life?

What are some examples of commonly used methods of distortion?

### **The Promise**

Having promised to be your God, and having made provision for God's own name (in the Second Commandment), God wants to protect your name as well. In fact, Jesus is especially particular about it, tightening up the Eighth Commandment to increase the protection.

In Matthew 5:21-22, we read that those who call someone a fool will be liable to the hell of fire. In the light of Christ's life-giving grace, harsh words can be seen for what

really are: death dealing. So Jesus reminds us that even insults and quick name-calling not only break the Eighth commandment, but also the Fifth—they are a form of killing.

How can these seemingly small and non offenses be considered so wrong?

re does the memory text (Matthew 12:34)  
us these offenses begin?

the promise carries us into the positive side of the Eighth commandment. For God is concerned about more than protecting us. God wants to make sure that we each seek to contribute to one another's good names. When neighbors are quick to judge one another, for example, rumors have a hard time getting started. Speaking well of another makes everyone feel welcome and valued for their gifts.

Interpreting one another's actions generously, or "in the kindest way," as the catechism puts it, is especially helpful. Conflicts often start with mind reading: Each side becomes convinced that they know the other's motives and that those motives are nasty. Anticipating good and looking for good reasons to believe the best can stop trouble in its tracks, putting a solid basis under a relationship.

Give some concrete examples of defending the neighbor, speaking well of her, and interpreting her actions in the kindest light, as for people you know have experienced it.

t have the results been?

#### **What does this mean?**

is more complicated than commandments. When some of the people in your own house can become your enemies, or close friends betray you, it is often hard to know how the Eighth Commandment applies.

For this reason, Jesus has provided a method for dealing with conflict. Matthew 18:15-17 is that plan. The first son to talk to about trouble is the one who is the source of difficulty. If that fails, another neighbor should come and so that things can be clarified, or the offender has another chance. It is only after two such visits that a person should take the issue to the community. If the congregation makes reasonable effort and the person still won't come to terms, it may be legitimate and even necessary to seal that person off so that daily contact is avoided altogether or kept to the strictest minimum.

This is a very painful thing for any believer. But among sinners, including those of deep faith, relationships can become so destructive that mutual love and service are impossible to restore. Those who have been through a divorce or some other deep conflict, for example, may find any form of contact uncomfortable—even intolerable. They may need the help of a counselor, pastor, or mediator to express their feelings and air their griefs. Throughout such a journey of pain, one can depend on Christ's strength and forgiveness and pray for some future end to the escalation of the conflict.

## 9. How does Jesus' method of dealing with conflict give the benefit of the doubt to the person who is considered to be the cause of the offense?

How does it protect the person who has been offended?

### **Looking Ahead**

After a good name and trustworthy talk, the next gift that is essential to life is some public confidence. So God says, "Thou shall not covet"—the Ninth Commandment.

### **About the Author**

*The Rev. James A. Nestingen is a popular speaker and author of several books on Lutheran theology. A gifted storyteller and teacher of faith, Dr. Nestingen is a professor of church history at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.*

# A Painter's Prayer

Marj Leegard

venly Father, let  
paint a picture  
will define a  
d. A picture so  
r and true that  
after it will be  
, "Church? The  
ure says it all."

I will put blue on  
palette for the  
White and gray  
he tall church on  
hilltop. Darkest green for the fir  
s that stretch past the steeple's  
ht. There will be yellow for the  
shining on the gravestones that  
o closely by.

Or shall I place my easel inside  
church that leaves a pane of  
s without the stained-glass  
t's touch so that the mountains  
be seen? Or should I go to the  
eld in Africa and sketch the low  
e walls with roofs that barely  
er the name?

Or might I choose the chapel  
rounded by science and history  
music and students? And, too,  
re is the room in an office build-  
where worship shapes the day  
the deliberations.

I have gray on my palette. I  
d put on canvas the inside of the  
rch with walls of cement slabs,  
gh edges of cement extruding  
n the places where workmen  
d the forms. Then I remember



the little Camp Fire  
girl, whose church  
this wasn't, saying,  
"But this isn't pret-  
ty!" And the answer  
from our tour-guide  
priest, "Ah, but you  
should see it when  
the people come with  
all their colors and  
their smiles. Then it  
is beautiful."

Oh Lord, you know I can't paint  
people. They won't stay still while I  
shut one eye and measure with my  
thumb and finger as if I know what  
I am doing. People move from the  
inside of the church to homes and  
apartments and hospitals and  
benches in deserted parks. They go  
to work and school and gatherings of  
others like themselves. They are  
only here long enough to be sent  
there by your call. And if I take my  
brushes to follow them, they point to  
people's needs, and wonder at my  
idleness.

No matter how many colors and  
shapes and shadows and canvasses I  
use, I cannot paint church. God,  
church is yours to define.

Include me in your definition,  
for Jesus' sake. Amen. □

*LWT columnist Marj Leegard is  
from Detroit Lakes, Minn.*

# Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

## ◆ Your daily prayer list

As you watched TV news shows, heard radio reports, or read the papers in the last few days, which stories tugged at your heart? Why not add those people to your prayer list? You might pray for:

- Families of victims of the Oklahoma City bombing and the Tokyo gas attack—and for those whose anger and hatred fuel such atrocities.
- The people of Rwanda, Haiti, Chechnya, Croatia, and other places where life is difficult and violent.
- People sandwiched between the competing needs of children and aging parents.
- Children, youth, and others who are returning to school to continue their studies.

## ◆ Prisoners raise funds for the hungry

Last September and again this year, the women inmates at Dwight Correctional Center in Kankakee (Ill.) Minimum Security Unit walked five kilometers inside the prison. Twenty-five percent of the proceeds benefited local hunger relief, and the remaining 75% went through Church World Service for disaster relief, food aid, and development throughout the world. Church

Women United of Illinois, Church World Service, and the Illinois Department of Corrections joined hands as sponsors.

*Be the strength and mainstay of these generous women, God of love.*

## ◆ Hospital on critical list

The Lutheran hospital in Jerusalem, Augusta Victoria, faces a threat to its existence because of funding cuts, uncertainty of the peace process, battle to get permits for staff who live in the West Bank, and the constant threat that groups in Israel will seize over the hospital's prime real estate.

*O God, show us how we can be part of the solution for places such as this.*

## ◆ Evangelism by the numbers

St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Portsmouth, Va., initiated "Gathering of the Seventy," an evangelism program where 70 members signed up to do home visits in the community. Some visit unchurched, some call on those who have visited the congregation, others call on shut-ins or people in the hospital. A seven-foot board in the library keeps track of the details.

*Help us to realize, Nurture us, O God, that evangelism can be as "simple" as showing love and sharing God's work in our lives.*

*Sonia C. Groenewold is senior news editor of The Lutheran.*

# A Prison Congregation

The Community of St. Dysmas is a congregation much like other Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations. There is regular worship and a church council. Several women participate in the men of the ELCA Bible study in *Lutheran Woman Today*. This 10-year-old congregation is unique because of its location inside the Maryland Correctional Institute in Baltimore, Md.

"The Community of St. Dysmas is in two locations," says the Rev. Charles Frederick, pastor of the congregation. "Maryland Correctional Institute for Men is a men's medium security unit. Maryland Correctional Institution for Women is a women's facility—listed as maximum security because it is the only men's unit in the system. Both are in Jessup, Maryland. Though separated by fences, razor wire, and about a half-mile distance, these two groups form the congregation. Each part has its own council and program schedule."

The Delaware-Maryland Synodical Women's Organization provided 30 subscriptions to *Lutheran Woman Today* and copies of *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Pastor Frederick notes that "several women on the inside have organized small Bible study groups in their housing units."

A prison congregation provides a means for Christians to follow Christ's exhortation to visit the imprisoned. Every week up to 10 people from neighboring congregations come for worship and fellowship with inmate members of The Community of St. Dysmas.

The inmate councils make programmatic decisions, as does any church council. For example, the women's council donates money earned through the sale of afghans and other projects to organizations such as the House of Ruth and family shelters that assist abused or battered women.

## Who is St. Dysmas?

Dysmas is the name given by the early church to the repentant thief on the cross next to Jesus. While sharing death row and execution with our Lord, Dysmas asked to be remembered when Jesus came into his glory. Jesus replied, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Prison congregations and ministries often use the name Dysmas because of Jesus' promise to this convicted criminal.

—Ed Nesselhuf

Studies suggest that, after release, St. Dysmas members are less likely to end up back in prison than nonmembers. "It is clear that providing a witness of the gospel in our prisons can have a positive effect upon the future lives of those who receive the good news," notes Pastor Frederick.

Below, three members of the Community of St. Dysmas, inmates in the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women, share their thoughts.

## Grateful to the Church

**W**orshiping at St. Dysmas Church is a never-ending source of comfort for me. I love the church, the congregation, the pastor (Charles Frederick), and the outside visitors and church volunteers with all my heart. St. Dysmas is a sense of belonging. I lived a tormented life as a drug addict, alone, desperate, selfish, and self-seeking. St. Dysmas is my family. On the prison campus grounds, going through daily routines, I can quickly recognize other members. I always give the sign of peace (two fingers). When trouble comes, I can always share my problems with another member.

### Prison Congregations of America

The Community of St. Dysmas in Maryland was founded by the Rev. Ed Nesselhuf as a mission congregation of the American Lutheran Church. Pastor Nesselhuf has since been instrumental in developing St. Dysmas congregations in South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. Several other states are in the process of forming prison congregations. For more information about Prison Congregations of America, contact: Pastor Ed Nesselhuf, Director, P.O. Box 415, 1 E. Main St., Vermillion, SD 57069-0415 Phone: 1-800-417-6692 •

I look forward to the day of church service. I know that I will be among my Christian sisters there and I will be filled with a sense of pride as we start scurrying around setting up chairs and equipment, passing hymnals and reading assignments, preparing for the service to start. We all work together with one accord to make our service the high point of our weekly activities. At our services, no one is left out. No matter how big or small the problem, or if you just want to give thanks, you can do so with our prayer list that is passed around and then read during the service.

Our pastor is very kind and understanding. More understanding than I can be at certain times, and he always tries to "pass it on." The most important lesson that I've learned from St. Dysmas is sharing. I try now to use the best of my ability to share with others the love and forgiveness of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

—Alice Metcalf

# ow I Felt Then nd How I Feel Now

just like I had no one,  
e beside or near.  
my father, and then my mother,  
aid, "I hate this year."  
ight I almost lost it all  
I gave my God a call.  
sat up, and then looked up  
eard a voice that said to me,  
t together right here and now  
u will never be free."  
I'm getting stronger daily  
se I start my day with a prayer,  
od has been so good to me  
v one day he'll set me free.  
have destroyed months of this year,  
things a body and mind should fear,  
norting, stealing, drinking, and lying.  
e God, give me a chance for living.

—Pamela Bryant

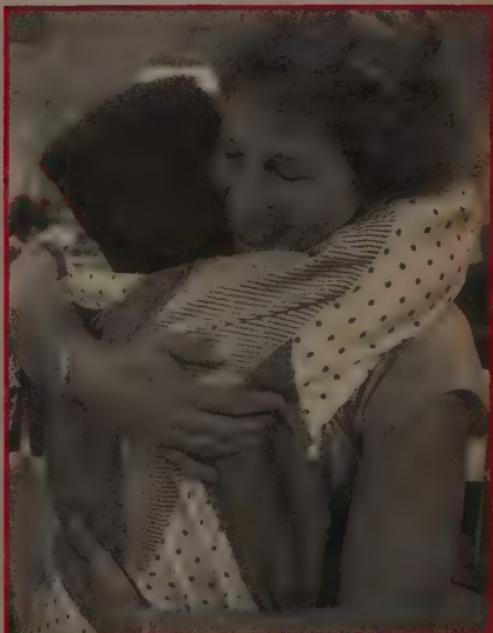
## ope for e Future

**M**y incarceration came during my twilight years. That term implies partial darkness and lateness in life. Both are correct. Incarceration sponged my body, and captivity freed me the time to think and heal. At 62, I've spent five Christmas and other holidays behind bars. Living in the land of pain, loss, and sin, the necessity of Savior's lowly birth, sacrificial death, and liberating resurrection have become crystal clear to me.

Three aspects of my confinement contributed to my well-being. First of all, I am able to obtain work in one of the state-use industry shops. Since there are not enough jobs for the inmates, this is a blessing. The small



Pastor Charles Frederick speaks with an inmate who attends the Community of St. Dysmas congregation at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women.



Inmate Sheron Sweitzer embraces another church-goer during a service at the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women.

amount that I earn is enough to purchase my personal items from our commissary. The state does not supply any needs outside room and board.

Secondly, I began attending St. Dysmas worship services on Saturday nights. Lutheran Bible studies also are offered every week on Tuesday nights. Pastor Charles Frederick leads informative and caring church services. Many guest ministers, including Bishop George Mocko (Delaware-Maryland Synod), have spoken to us. Volunteer musicians lead us in singing praises to God—even birds in cages need to sing. Pastor Frederick supplies us with Lutheran magazines, which are in great demand. Several women have formed small Bible study groups using material supplied in Lutheran Woman Today magazine.

**F**inally, by affording myself the opportunity to take college courses, as the result of receiving Pell grants, I have expanded my horizons, freed my bound-up psyche, and found hope for the future.

All my life, I've searched for God. Now I have found him in prison. He is mine and I am his. Like the apostle Paul, I feel compelled to share my joy. In the book of Jeremiah I also have taken comfort in the following verse, "When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

—Betty Smith

# A Prision Ministry Transformed by Forgiveness

Glenda Naegele

"I've heard about God all my life, but I never knew God's love until I met you, Mrs. Glenda." What had I done to flesh out God's love for this young inmate of a California Youth Authority prison? I had brought him a birthday cake, pad of writing paper, and a pen. His fellow Bible study students sang "Happy Birthday," he explained, tears in his eyes, that this was his first birthday party, ever.

Through the teaching of God's Word, the love of Jesus touches and illuminates hardened hearts, and Mariposa Prison Ministry experiences the transformation of angry, violent, and addicted lives. A son who hurts another has also been hurt. The healing of both begins with receiving, believing, and sharing Christ's forgiveness.

Internalizing the forgiveness of Christ ("God forgives me") begins a process that, like a beautiful butterfly emerging from the ugly cocoon, transforms lives filled with abuse, rejection, and hopelessness. Then, warmth, Christ's love and the care and concern of Christ's people, new life and new purpose begin to flow into these new creatures of Christ. Mariposa Prison Ministry draws heavily from this imagery—*mariposa* is the Spanish word for butterfly.

"A new heart I will give you, and a spirit I will put within you," we promised in Ezekiel 36:26. Alfredo says this promise is true. Alfredo, tainted by what he had done to a girl while he was in a drugged stupor, rarely raised his head. He lived through his days trying to protect everyone, himself in particular. When he was able to accept that God's payment for sin applied to "God forgives me"), a transformation began.

After much Bible study, in-depth counseling, and prayer, Alfredo was able to forgive himself and to see himself as the beloved son of God that he had become a new creature in Christ.

**N** when paroled from prison, Alfredo was determined to go home, gather together his family, and, through Bible study, offer to them his newfound love and hope. Today he is married, attends Narcotics Anonymous regularly, and shares the love of Jesus with people in his neighborhood. He struggles to live up to his concept of a "good" Christian.

After Alfredo left prison, another inmate asked me, "May I join the Bible study, Mrs. Glenda? I didn't know do very well, but I watched him go. I want whatever it was he did."

My students beg me to bring them Holy Communion. Since they are Spanish speaking and the chapel offers English services, the Bible studies are their only opportunity to receive the beloved assurances of absolute and forgiveness in their own language. Even though we must meet in the prison's visiting hall, surrounded by very imaginable noise and dis-

traction, a sense of deep reverence and joy permeates the group every time we share together our Lord's Supper. One student commented after a celebration, "Now I feel clean for the first time in my life."

Drugs, gang rivalry, and drive-by shootings plague our society today. "Three strikes and you're out" or the prevailing attitude of society that says "lock them up and throw away the key" is not the answer. To say that "Jesus is the answer" is true but too simplistic. As Christians we must flesh out Christ's love with our own love, care, and concern for these rejected, feared, and unwanted members of society.

Almost all my students have been involved with drugs or murder. One of these "murderers" gave me a birthday card with the following message: "I want to take this time to express to you my gratitude and appreciation for all you have done for me. You hold the key which opened my heart to our Lord Jesus Christ. You opened my closed eyes to see the life I was blind to. Because of this, I wish you the very best on your special day. With all my heart, Ramon."

I can only add, "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for using Mariposa Prison Ministry as your instrument to bring light and transformation into hearts and lives." CA

*Glenda Naegele, Ontario, Calif., is preparing for ordination at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, via the alternate route to ordination for special ministries.*



# Welcoming Hearts

Lydia A. Calder



The falling autumn leaves somehow symbolized my falling spirits. The thousand miles from family and friends to new lodging was small, over-priced apartment in a large, impersonal city. My teacher salary would be half just paying the rent. And, as a full-time student, my husband Bob would have little energy making a financial contribution. Fancy furnishings were out of the question, fancy foods were off the menu, and owning a car was a distant dream.

Not only that, we were among strangers. It was unsettling to realize that no one in this huge city really cared. We clung only to each other to cling to the wind off the Great Lakes which was a long cold winter.

Our single ray of hope was the church that had been recommended by a friend back home.

rtunately, it was a long and complicated transit ride, particularly on a Sunday morning. Then a member of the church offered to be our taxi service for as long as we needed. What a blessing! He and his wife were our first links of friendliness in our new church community. We were invited to a home Bible study group. This diverse and harmonious group soon made us feel comfortable, and we began to feel at home.

As Christmas neared, our new church came alive with activity. One evening our Bible study group went door-to-door as we delivered treats for the less fortunate. Tearful eyes greeted us at many doors, and I was struck by my joy as a newcomer to reach out and touch the heart of another. Truly the Lord provides for us, that we in turn can provide for others. We also discovered in those first months that God's provisions take a very practical form. Money was a constant worry. Each month lasted far longer than my patience. Although we didn't speak of our financial struggles, people quickly saw our situation and responded. One day the postman delivered an envelope containing 10 grocery coupons and 10 transit tickets. It was a gift from heaven. We never did discover who sent it, but that anonymous person lifted our spirits for

News of our inadequate furnishings traveled around the congregation.

During December, money came in from both groups and individuals. This godsend allowed us to purchase a sofa and a coffee table, as well as a holiday feast. Truly we experienced the miracle of sharing. The financial generosity was



heartwarming, but no more so than the companionship. We were included in family celebrations and made to feel like we truly belonged. Harry and Ruth, who were 15 years older, "adopted" us, and we four soon became inseparable. We were so comfortable with one another that we could delight in an evening of quiet conversation around the kitchen table. Their door was always open and their hearts forever welcoming.

The thaw came early that spring, and on Easter Sunday we shed the winter woollies for shorts and T-shirts. Basking in the sun, I marveled at the passing of winter. The snow had been heavy, and the wind strong, but it had not been nearly so long or cold as I had feared. In fact, it was one of the warmest winters I remember. C

*Lydia Calder is a freelance writer from New Westminster, British Columbia.*



FIRST IN A SERIES

# Human Care: LSMOs

Debra Illingworth Greene

Last year, more than one million people were served by the 250 Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations (LSMOs) that are affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

"We're one of the largest human-care delivery services in the nation, and we're uniquely large in proportion to the number of Lutherans in this country," said Gary Stubenvoll. From the ELCA's churchwide offices in Chicago, Stubenvoll is director of support to social ministry organizations.

Lutherans have a long tradition of helping others because, Stubenvoll says, "the word on Sunday morning is carried over into Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday..."

ELCA members and congregations help support Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations through their offerings. Church support, through congregations and synods, is one of the three main sources of funding for LSMOs. Two other sources of funding come from the fees people pay to receive services, and from the government, which

also pays fees for LSMO services to recipients.

Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations are also supported by volunteers. Last year, 80,017 volunteers served nearly five million hours at the 250 LSMOs. You can even be one of the organization's 80,073 employees.

Where are the ELCA's social ministry organizations? Every state in the United States—except Vermont and Rhode Island—has at least one, along with the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

And what do they do? Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations provide a wide range of services, from alcohol- and drug-dependence counseling programs, to adult day-care centers, to adoption services. Some Lutheran Social Ministries, such as nursing homes, provide just one service. Others provide a multitude of programs, such as the 125-year-old Lutheran Social Services of Illinois, which served 250,000 people last year.

Over the next several months, *Lutheran Woman Today* will feature a sampling of the social ministries provided by Lutherans. Watch for stories about these ministries:

## **Second Family, Lutheran al Services of Illinois.**

nd Family helps HIV-positive  
nts make plans for the healthy  
ren they eventually will  
an. Second Family recruits and  
s adoptive families, who meet  
form relationships with the  
parents. The adoptive families  
help children through  
grieving process after  
birth parents die. This  
ue program strives to  
children out of the fos-  
are system, helping to  
oth the transition from  
family to another.

## **Care Team Ministry, aphine Sunset Home, wood, Wash.**

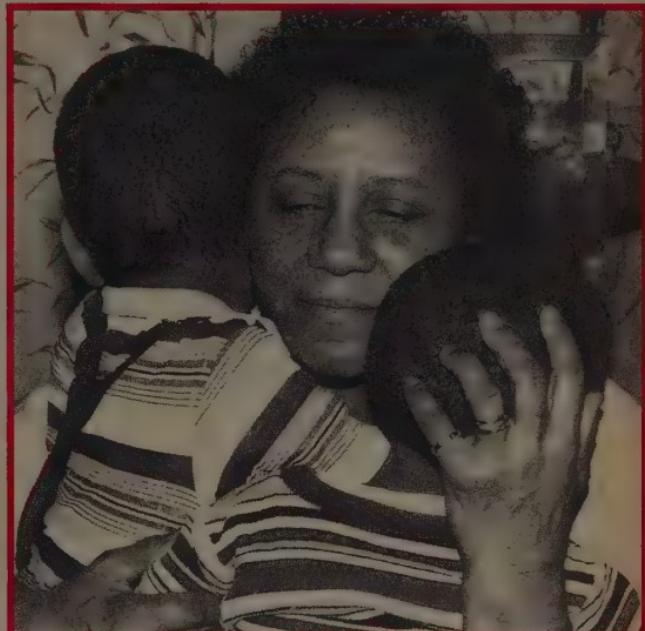
Based at  
theran nursing home,  
new ministry forms  
trains teams of volun-  
. The teams help fami-  
in the community with  
erly loved ones who  
Alzheimer's and other  
ling diseases. The vol-  
ers act as a second family and  
ve caregivers. The care teams  
orm a variety of services for the  
ts, filling in where other help is  
available.

## **Family Assistance Centers, theran Social Services of thern California.**

These cen-  
work with the families of peo-  
incarcerated in state prisons.  
centers provide transportation,  
care, clothing exchanges and  
ks to family members while  
ing their loved ones in prison.  
goal of the centers is to main-  
strong family bonds, which  
ance rehabilitation and reduce  
ivism (falling back into crime)

when the family member is  
released from prison.

- Social Ministry Outreach  
Project, Lutheran Social Ser-  
vices of New England.** This new  
program helps Lutheran congrega-  
tions in New England identify  
unmet needs in their communities.



Then the program helps the congrega-  
tions in developing new social  
ministry programs to meet those  
needs. The project helps Lutherans  
at the local level serve their neigh-  
bors in need.

If you would like more informa-  
tion about a program, or if you'd like  
to know more about Lutheran  
Social Ministry Organizations in  
your area, contact Gary Stubenvoll  
in the ELCA's Division for Church  
in Society, at 1-800-638-3522, ext.  
2684. CAG

*Debra Illingworth Greene is a free-  
lance writer who lives in Madison,  
Wis., with her husband and infant  
son.*

# The Ants Go Marching

Jennifer Young Jarmon

**I have ants.** In my kitchen, that is, but somehow I take personally that the creatures have chosen my kitchen, of all places, as their new convention center.

And my husband just doesn't comprehend the gravity of the situation. As I reach for the glass cleaner to shoot yet another of the tiny irritants, he sings, "The ants go marching one by one, hurrah, hurrah..." until I give him the look normally reserved for mischievous children and point the spray bottle at him.

I try every safe and reasonable method I know to rid my house of ants: ant baits, lemon juice on the trails, you name it. I learned the glass cleaner trick from an aunt who has a friend who knows someone who kills ants. "Glass cleaner kills ants," the aunt tells me. I later discover that the cleaner kills only the ants on which it is directly sprayed. I hesitate to use insecticide, which might be more effective, because I'm concerned about the effects of the spray on my infant daughter. I also reject a friend's suggestion that I acquire a pair of nippers for my kitchen.

I'm particularly concerned about

ants as I prepare for a baby shower in my home. When I explain my plight to my friend Linda, who comes early to help me get ready, she nods understandingly and tells me about her ant experience in south Florida. Her family had just moved into a new, concrete block house when they saw ants streaming out of every crevice in the house, including the electrical sockets. She finally discovered that ants were drawn to the half-empty soft drinks cans that the construction workers had jammed into the holes of the blocks as they built the house. There was little that Linda could do about the ants, short of tearing down the house, block by block. Hearing this, I struggle (mostly unsuccessfully) to put my situation in perspective.

Soon the baby shower guests arrive, and talk immediately turns to difficult-labor and ugly-baby stories. In sympathy for the expectant mother, I attempt to change the subject. The guests apparently have only one other topic on their minds, however: disgusting creatures. As the conversation turns to snakes, bats, and (of course) ants, I realize I should have planned baby-shower games for us to play.

I wonder why I am so irritated by the ants in my kitchen. It is convenient to have to wash each dish both before and after eating on. Naturally, I would prefer to keep all food in the kitchen cabinets rather than upstairs in the guest room. Perhaps the real reason for my frustration is that I'm afraid my guests will think I'm a poor housekeeper when they see the ants

parading across my kitchen counter. But should someone who survived Hurricane Hugo, suffered through (and passed!) bar exams in two states, and endured 68 hours of labor in childbirth worry about a few ants?

I recall my devotional reading from a few days before the baby shower. Paul wrote in Hebrews 10:23, "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful." The passage reminds me of God's faithfulness and encourages me to consider the nature of the hope I profess. I realize once again that my hope is not in living an easy life or making a good impression on my guests, but in trusting in Christ. The Bible calls Christ our hope, the anchor for our souls. I begin to grab hold of the idea of Christ as a solid anchor on which believers can rely, whether our troubles are large or ant-size.

I continue to struggle with the ants that have moved in with my family. I attempt to cope with the problem through humor, occasional anger, and a shot of glass cleaner now and then. I'm beginning to put this minor problem into perspective, though, and to see God more clearly. As God helps me concentrate on those things of life that are more important than ants in my kitchen, I hold on to one more happy thought: surely there will be no ants in heaven. C

*Jennifer Young Jarrett, Holden, Mass., is temporarily retired from a career as an attorney and is now a homemaker, raising a daughter and son. P.S. The family has moved from "the ant house."*

# St. Paul's Teacher

Colleen Nordhausen-Garton

**E**very time I reminisce about that little white church in the country with the grand steeple tower and the chimes ringing of the Sunday morning bells, I think of the strength of the women I knew there. What great teachers they were. It seemed that despite the trials in their own lives, the stumbling blocks they had to hurdle, the light of Jesus always, always, there in great measure.

I was a young bride in those early years, and they seemed like great saints of wisdom. Each one was so strong about what she believed and about how she wanted to live her life and guide the lives of her children for the Lord.

The devil must have quaked at the thought of that little white church in the country where the music of the organ and piano rattled and shook the rafters in praise to God, and where prayers poured from the hearts of the people. I thought it was all perfect, in those days.

Now I am much older, and having walked through trials and tribulations myself, I remember there were, in that little white church in the country, struggling marriages, rebellious children, and alcohol abuse...whatever was there in that fallen world. Those in the church had—and have—their burdens. The difference? How the burdens are carried.

The women at St. Paul's were women of history over their trials and, oh, how they supported each other in prayer. From the oldest to the very youngest, they carried each other in their trials. They were bound together in bonds of love (Ecclesiastes 4).

I thank God for Esther and Charlene and Marge and all the other powerful teachers. Their example is still a great measure of the strength of my faith. When I read in Isaiah 30:20 (NIV), "Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the cup of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your eyes you will see them," I will always be reminded of those powerful prayer warriors, my teachers at St. Paul's.

Lord, I wish to be one of those teachers. Use me. ☺

*Colleen Nordhausen-Garton, Loveland, Colo., is a freelance writer. She and her husband, Ben, are leaders in their local church youth group.*

# Adieu, Terry

Kathryn E. Kopf

y Schutz died of cancer. Not that anyone expected. —Dorothy Apple, Lois Her, and I—all friends from the other staff of Lutheran Church Women, had seen her just three weeks before, and she was clearly very ill. But she was, as always, a gracious hostess and happy to show off her new apartment not far from her office at Johns Hopkins Press in Baltimore. Now we were headed back to Baltimore for her funeral and burial.

Terry was the last editor of *Lutheran Women* magazine (a predecessor of *Lutheran Woman* today). She was responsible for its content, production, and distribution. Her love of language, her sense of justice, and her keen eye for stories resulted in many awards for the magazine. Her no-nonsense approach made her an excellent manager.

Terry came to Philadelphia from a editorial position in New York, and lived in a center-city apartment with her two cats. When her mother died, they bought a house and moved together. Many of us enjoyed this arrangement, as we shared her warm hospitality and wonderful meals. When one of the cats died,



Terry added an exuberant Belgian sheepdog to the household, and soon after another Belgian sheepdog. Terry had lived briefly in France and loved the country and its language. Hence the names of some of her animals: Noel, Beau, Belle.

With her move to a new home, Terry also found a new church, St. Martin in the Fields. Joining the choir opened her to friends who were to be a strong support in the coming years.

After leaving Lutheran Church Women, Terry spent several years freelancing before becoming an editor for Johns Hopkins Press. In Baltimore, she fell while walking her dogs. A resulting persistent pain led to the discovery of her cancer. She kept going till her death, finding support in old friends and the caring church family of St. Martin's.

It's still hard to believe Terry died, but we rejoice in her life and thank God for the talents she shared with us through *Lutheran Women* magazine. C

*Kathryn E. Kopf, Philadelphia, Pa., served as executive director of Lutheran Church Women from 1976 to 1987.*

# Remembering

On a cold, clear February day I visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Despite all the times I have been in Washington, I had never seen the memorial, and so I chose this day to make my pilgrimage.

I walked for what seemed like miles to get there, wondering all the while what impact this special place would have for me.

It was not quite as I expected. Others had told me, "There are always hundreds of people there." "People leave flowers and other offerings." "There are always people tracing the names of their loved ones."

I saw none of this—no flowers, no offerings, no one tracing names. I saw about two dozen people, Americans and international visitors, walking by the monument in silence and reverence.

The memorial is a long stone wall, not visible from the street, inscribed with the names of those Americans who died fighting in Vietnam from 1959 to 1975, "in the order in which they were taken from us." Darden and daSilva, Ficara and Sorensen, the names stretch out along the wall and unite



forever those  
were stranger  
life.

Martin and  
tinez, Johansen  
Wong—the na  
continue on and  
Dooley and Dorr  
"Is my daddy's n  
here?" a little  
asked as I walked  
"No, honey, but  
grandpa's name  
Grezman, Gri  
Polesetsky, Lez

A nation says t  
you in this mem  
the contributions of the Amer  
people."

monument, this one to the we  
who served and those who di  
Vietnam. Here there are no na  
only statues of women holding  
wounded, caring for others, loo  
to the sky for the next attack.

Ficara, daSilva, Martin  
Gribler, and the unnamed wom  
I did not know any of them, bu  
pay silent tribute to them n  
realize that they were my sons  
daughters, my brothers and si  
as they were yours.

Let us pray that we never  
to go to war again, that our son  
our daughters never have to r  
to arms again, and that we and  
will know peace at last. C

*Charlotte E. Fiechter  
Executive Director*

# TC Scholarships

t's less than a year away! The Women of the ELCA Triennial Convention will be in the Twin Cities Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn., in ten days! The dates are 11-14, 1996. Are you planning there?

In the spring of this year, your congregation received a packet of information that gave a host of details about this exciting event. The theme, "Proclaim God's Peace," is based on Ephesians 6:15b, which says... "Put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace." Worship and Bible study center on this theme. A Convention Without Walls program also offers experiences to enhance the theme. Workshops are designed to offer personal growth experiences, as well as organizational knowledge. The convention exhibit area, called the Praise Station, will boast interactive exhibits, information about peace, and some surprises. There will be many, many opportunities to learn, experience, and share with thousands of others. Sing the singing!

Attending a triennial convention is a tremendous opportunity. Women of the ELCA has a scholarship fund available to encourage participation by those



women who do not have enough financial resources for this experience. (Participating in the triennial convention will cost approximately \$500 for your registration, hotel, food, and some spending money. You must add the cost of transportation from your area to this base amount.)

Women who are members of ELCA congregations, have a history of participation in the women's organization, are in need of financial assistance, and meet the application deadline requirements, may request up to \$500 in assistance. Recipients may not be relatives of churchwide Women of the ELCA board members or staff.

If you meet these requirements, write for an application at the address below. The completed application is due February 15, 1996. (Check with representatives from your congregational unit, synod, and/or SWO to see if additional scholarship programs are available through these sources.)

Will you be there? We hope so. For an application write today to: Triennial Convention Scholarships, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

*Beckie M. Steele*

*Director for Leadership  
Development*

\* *Triennial Convention Twin Cities*

## Celebrating Literacy Month

# The Power of the Word

Jane E. Strohl

**As a child,** I loved to be read to. Going to the public library, picking out books for my mother to bring home, and laying claim to her undivided attention as we sat together on the sofa and she shared with me the world of words—this was central to our family routine.

Then one Easter, tucked next to my basket of candy, was a book titled *A Fly Went By*. (It is still in print to these many years later!) My mother remembers how I ran about announcing excitedly, “I can read this!” I was able to experience the power of words for myself in a new way.

I now am blessed with a two-year-old daughter, Lucy, whose most clearly articulated words (besides “no”) are “another book.” One recent evening I was in the kitchen, delayed from beginning our story hour on schedule. When I emerged, I found Lucy sitting contentedly, turning the pages of a pudgy board book about Bert and Ernie, the popular odd couple from the children’s show Sesame Street. She was putting the right words with the pictures, almost as if she were reading the text: “Ernie can laugh. Bert can

cry. Bert can throw; Ernie can catch.”

In not too many years, Lucy will come home from church, as her mother once did, a delighted first grader in proud possession of her own Bible. And before long she will be reading for herself about David and Saul, Mary and Martha, Jesus and his disciples.

Human beings are creatures of words. We grow by learning the power of having words—first to speak and then to read. A friend of mine has a son 11 months older than my daughter. We spent a week at his quarters at Holden Village (Cross Lake, Wash.) last summer. When Lucy was frustrated or distressed, she shrieked. When Thomas lost his cool, his mother would encourage him, “Use your words. Tell me what you need.” What a difference being able to speak made. That is what could give a name to what he said and felt.

Just as language allows us to name our world, reading gives us access to all kinds of knowledge and ideas. From deciphering a prescription or directions on a medicine bottle to reading a piece of legislation or meditating

im, reading connects us with world and allows us to enter life with a sense of competence, power, and curiosity.

Human beings not only use words, we also receive them. What we hear, what penetrates our minds and hearts as truth, shapes us our lives through. The gospel of Christ is an event of communication; it is preeminently an exchange of words. God speaks to us a promise of forgiveness of sins. He declares to us God's love of us individually and of the whole of creation. And we speak in response: "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief" "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" or "Amen."

One of the distinctive teachings of Luther in the reforming movement that bears his name is "the priesthood of all believers." In 1522 Luther began a sermon before the people at the Wittenberg church with these famous words: "The summons of death comes to us all, and no man can die for another. Every one must fight his own battle with death by himself, alone. We can put into another's ears, but every one must himself be prepared for the hour of death, for I will be with you then, nor

you with me. Therefore every one must himself know and be armed with the chief things which concern a Christian."\*

Every one of us is called to make her or his own confession of faith. The effect of baptism is to make us all priests, that is, persons empowered and charged to search the Scriptures, test the proclamation of our community for its faithfulness to the gospel, offer prayers before God for the needs of our world, and do the work of an evangelist. To make our confession and to fulfill our priesthood we need the power of words.

And a very basic way to care for our neighbors is to help them acquire the power of words. To work for literacy for all is simple justice and sound discipleship. A



if they  
can't read  
the  
words,  
they  
can't read  
the  
WORD



YOU  
can help  
make the difference!

*Jane E. Strohl is associate professor of church history at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn. She served as pastor of St. John Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, Conn.*

\* From Martin Luther's *Basic Theological Writings*, Fortress Press, 1989.

The earth was parched, thirsty. Winds sucked in every drop of moisture. Patio plants drooped, worn from fighting the wind. Yes, the earth was parched, but so was I. Identifying our dusty patio, I too felt covered with dust. That week I'd been in too much wind. A whirlwind.

# Rain On Me

Vivian Elaine Johnson

You know what it's like. Days filled with too many people, too many word activities. Turmoil blew from many directions. Soft, gentle breezes gave way to forceful winds of attack. Deluge kicked up loose sand, enveloping, choking like a desert sandstorm, stirring up.

the exposed skin of my vulnerable self.

Wait. What was that on the patio? A few drops. More. More. Steady, rhythmic droplets covered the cement. The rain came. The flowers drank. The dust fled as the earth bathed in heaven's life-giving fluid. Leaves, blossoms, grass, cement...all shining in liquid freshness.

I envied them. Oh, God, rain on my desert. Rain on me. When I were a child I'd run out and play in the rain. Play in the rain! Could I...should I...why not?

I put on my boots, flung open the door, and heard myself say, "Here I come...ready or not!"

I was a child again. A child in my own backyard. Lifting my head to the sky, the wet drops washed, cleansed me. All the dust and dirt of the past week went streaming to the ground. Tears came, therapeutic tears. Opening my mouth, raindrops found their way down my parched throat, cooling and loosening its tightness. Water! Drink! Water dripped from nose, chin, elbows. My hair was soaked. Fun! Tears turned to chuckles.

Puddles beckoned. Lifting one foot, plop. Another one. Again...and again. What a splash! Water found its way into my boots. Toes wiggled in the wetness. My glee was that of a child. (Were my neighbors watching?) It was wonderful! Walking, jumping, running in the rain. I was refreshed, replenished, like a leaf.

Later, wrapped in a bathrobe and drying my hair with a towel, I recalled Peter's words to Jesus: "Wash me, Lord. Not just my feet, but all of me."

I had read those words before. Now I understood them.

*Vivian Elaine Johnson, Cambridge, Minn., is the co-creator of "Life Stories," a communications game, as well as other games.*

# Bulletin Board

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